

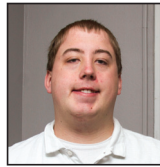













































Pick ‘Em WEEK 1

Our basketball writers and celebrity guests make their picks

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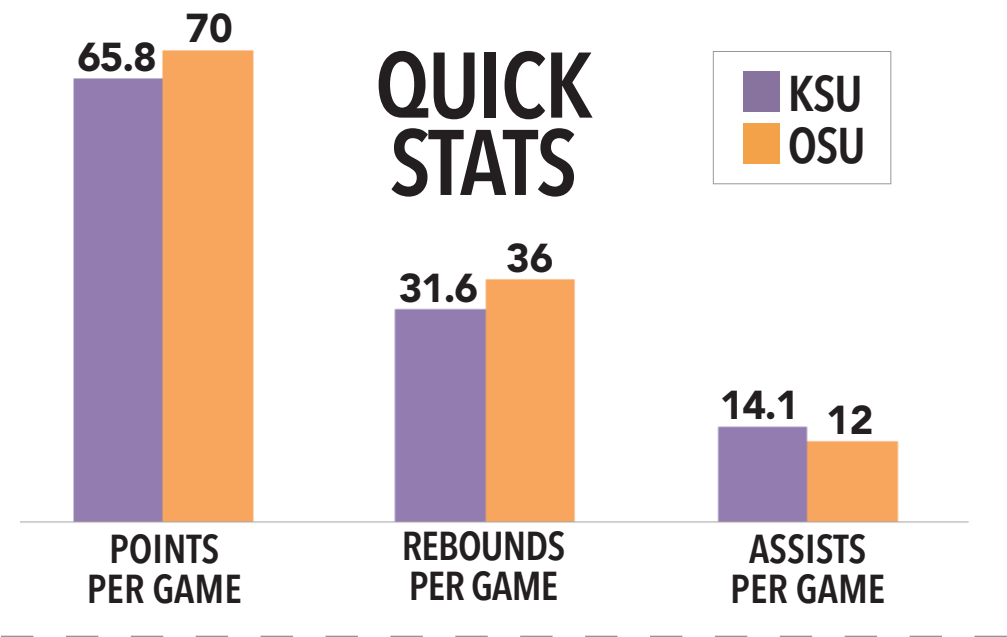
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TIPOFFGUIDE



K-STATE VS. OKLAHOMA STATE

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TOP SCORING PLAYERS

1. Marcus Foster #2 13.7 PPG	1. Le'Bryan Nash #2 17.6 PPG
2. Nino Williams #11 11.5 PPG	2. Phil Forte III #13 17.2 PPG
3. Thomas Gipson #42 11.4 PPG	3. Anthony Hickey Jr. #12 8.8 PPG

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K-State seeks redemption, win over Forte, Nash, Oklahoma State

By TIMOTHY EVERSON
THE COLLEGIAN

Needless to say, K-State wants another crack at Oklahoma State.

In their last meeting on Jan. 3, the Wildcats were knee-deep in their own wallow, riding a two-game losing skid into Stillwater, Oklahoma against the Cowboys.

After finding solace in a 2-point halftime lead, the second half turned into another nightmare for K-State, as a 25-4 Oklahoma State run fueled the Cowboys to a 61-47 victory.

Sophomore guard Marcus Foster did not start that game due to a declining attitude and quality of play. In fact, he spent most of it on the bench, finishing with 0 points and facing much criticism after the game.

However, since that point, K-State has looked like an entirely different team. Even coming off a close loss against No. 9 Iowa State in Ames, Iowa last Tuesday, the ship appears to finally be headed down the correct channel instead of down the drain.

Saturday, Foster and the Wildcats (11-8, 4-2) have a chance at redemption against Oklahoma State (13-5, 3-3), as the two teams tipoff from the friendly confines of Bramlage Coliseum.

"For me, definitely revenge," Foster said Thursday. "I didn't get to play that much and I know a lot of guys on that team. So it's definitely something I can't wait for." Foster has been on a tear since the game in Stillwater, averaging 15.6 points in K-State's last five games. Senior forward Nino Williams has also enjoyed recent success, including a career-high 22 points Tuesday.

The Wildcats are coming off the heartbreaking loss at No. 9 Iowa State where they gave the Cyclone everything they could handle. Head coach Bruce Weber appreciated the effort, but he knows that a loss is still a loss.

"I thought there were some really long faces after the (Iowa State) game," Weber said. "It's a fine line. You don't get much out of defeat, but we did compete with a really good team. I was flying yesterday through Dallas and Iowa State fans came up to me and said,



RODNEY DIMICK | THE COLLEGIAN

Sophomore guard **Jevon Thomas** dribbles around a player on Nov. 17, 2014 at Bramlage Coliseum. Thomas has a total of 14 assists this season.

"We were at the game, Coach. Unbelievable. We thought you had us." So, very positive things, but at the same time we didn't win the game."

In the first game against K-State, Oklahoma State found ways to get it done with multiple guys, including four different players in double figures led by junior guard Phil Forte III with 20 points.

Forte and senior forward Le'Bryan Nash both average just over 17 points per game. Nash also averages around six rebounds for the Cowboys.

"You know what they are; it's Forte, it's Nash," Weber said. "That's (the) thing that hurt us the last time. We talked about holding Forte or Nash under their scoring average and we held Nash to 11, but then we let all of those other guys get in double figures and (they) hit some big shots. That makes the difference in them being in the 50s or in the 60s."

Oklahoma State is coming off a 20-point win over Texas Tech on Wednesday. The Cowboys had

lost their previous two games by a combined 27 points prior to the clash with the Red Raiders.

In addition to welcoming Oklahoma State back to Manhattan, Saturday is also Legends Weekend in the Little Apple. The dedication of the new "Tex Winter Drive" that leads up to the basketball training facility will take place at 9 a.m. Saturday before the 11 a.m. tipoff.

As many as 50 former K-State basketball players will be in town to watch the Wildcats take on Oklahoma State, including the 1974-75 Elite Eight team who will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of their run with a special halftime ceremony.

K-State is also planning a "Stripe Out" event in Bramlage Coliseum to benefit the American Cancer Society and Coaches vs. Cancer. K-State fans are being asked to wear either purple or white depending on the corresponding section on their ticket. Fans can visit kstatesports.com to see what color their section is in.

Foster's resurgence returns to where it began

By TATE STEINLAGE
THE COLLEGIAN

K-State sophomore guard Marcus Foster thought he was at the podium to talk about his latest double-digit scoring performance. His 23 points led K-State in a gritty win over TCU at home, snapping a three-game losing streak.

Instead, Foster was asked about Oklahoma State, specifically a run-in with head coach Bruce Weber that was caught on national television. Only a small number of writers were present to hear Foster speak, but thousands more were listening at home, hanging onto each and every word.

"It was just me not being me, really, honestly," Foster said. "I had bad body language, a bad attitude toward Coach. You know, that's something I've never done. And that's never going to happen again."

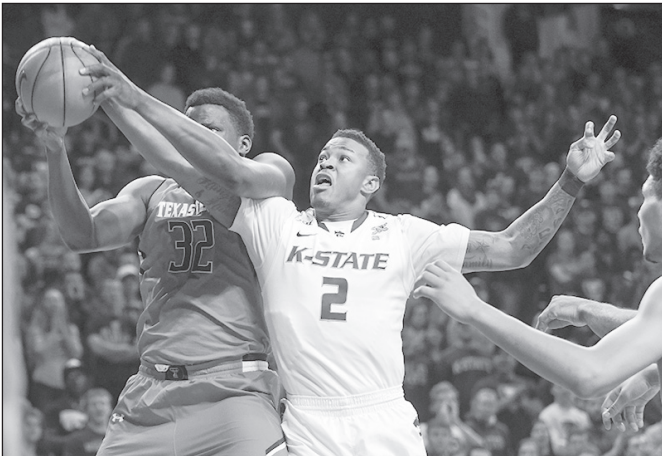
Foster, who started the game on the bench, played just 14 minutes against Oklahoma State. He finished with 0 points, his team a 61-47 loss. Worse, though, was the knock to Foster's confidence.

"I lost a little confidence in myself after Stillwater," he said. "Coming home on that bus, I didn't know what to think was going to happen. It could've gone either way. I just wanted to prove to myself that I'm still a good player — don't get down on yourself, it happens to every basketball player."

Some players would crumble in that situation, and few would be as open and direct as Foster was. In the end, though, it benefitted him.

"I'm just at the point where I'm going to do what ever it takes for my team. Right now, I don't care if I score or not; whether I'm scoring 30 points or none. I just want to win at this point now." - Marcus Foster

Foster's 23 points against the Horned Frogs was just the start. He then hit two shots — one to go into overtime, and the other to win the



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

Sophomore guard **Marcus Foster** tries to grab a rebound from Texas Tech forward/center **Norense Odiase** in the first half of the Wildcats' 58-51 win over the Red Raiders on Jan. 14, 2015, in Bramlage Coliseum.

game — as K-State knocked off No. 16 Oklahoma on the road. He followed that performance up with 14 points in a win against Texas Tech and a combined 27 points in the two games after that.

If you do the math, that's 15.6 points per game for Foster in K-State's last five games. His performance — and he himself — is a far cry from what everyone saw in Stillwater three weeks ago.

"I'm just at the point where I'm going to do what ever it takes for my team," Foster said. "Right now, I don't care if I score or not; whether I'm scoring 30 points or none. I just want to win at this point now."

Since Oklahoma State, Foster has practiced better. His mentality has improved as well. Now, when he checks out, Foster high-fives every player on the bench before sitting down and animatedly cheering on his teammates.

Though winning comes first to Foster, earning back respect and proving claims of a "sophomore slump" wrong may be a close second.

"People thought, 'You know, he made his little run from last season to this season and he was playing so well. Now he's going to fall back and not be as good as he

was,'" Foster said. "But I've had to regain a lot of respect from players, coaches and fans everywhere so that's just something that I have to do."

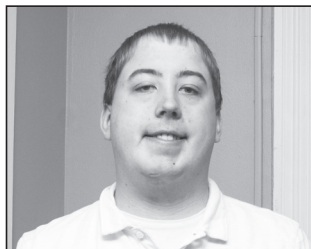
Saturday, Foster faces Oklahoma State again, three weeks removed from arguably the lowest point in his K-State career. In front of him stands an opportunity for redemption. There's also an opportunity to lead K-State to a fifth conference win.

Both Foster and Weber are going "all in" on the latter.

"I hope he keeps doing more things like five rebounds against Iowa State," Weber said. "Five defense rebounds is a positive step forward. I still want him to get to the free-throw line and get to the hoop. Early in the season he was allergic to the paint. You have to get in there. You saw that against TCU, which I thought was his best game, he had 10 or 12 free throws. That's all I was harping on. Don't settle for three."

K-State fans can only hope that this time, on Saturday, Foster will take the podium after the game to questions about a win and a confident performance. The type of performance everyone around the country has come to expect from Foster.

Does the Big 12 deserve the hype?



TIMOTHY EVERSON
THE COLLEGIAN

Well, Big 12 fans, after a disappointing football season where it seemed like there was no winning with the national media, a season where you felt no one really gave you the respect you felt like you deserved, congratulations! Your time has arrived.

The Big 12 has been anointed by the powers that be as the de facto "one conference to rule them all." The heartland of America is supposedly where the best college basketball in America is being played.

The Big 12 has six of its 10 teams ranked in the top 25. Depending on what poll you favor, it has seven or eight teams that are ranked or at least receiving votes.

That is the most of any conference this season. It blows everyone out of the water minus the ACC, who sports five-ranked teams.

But before the Big 12 cracks open a bottle of delicious vindication, let's be sure that the Big 12 dominance is more truth than hype. Remember, this is the same media that anointed the SEC West champions of the world before its top-five teams all lost in their respected bowl games.

Yes, the Big 12 has six teams ranked in both polls, but it only have one team ranked in the top 10: No. 9 Iowa State.

While the ACC only has five teams ranked, four of those teams are ranked in the top 10.

But, again, on the side of the Big 12 every team has at least 10 wins. The ACC has four schools with less than 10 and two more with exactly 10.

What does that really mean? Honestly, it's fairly telling.

The Big 12 is a dynamo, no doubt about it. Top to bottom, it's a solid league with really good teams down the stretch.

But, are any of these teams great? Are any of them even Final Four worthy?

Some may point to Iowa State. They beat Kansas, which is a feat. Any year, no matter how mediocre the Jayhawks seem at times, a win against head coach Bill Self is not something to be taken lightly.

Iowa State also lost to West Virginia, which is a good team; Maryland, which has turned into a very good team in a "meh" Big 10; and South Carolina, who is better than they have been.



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

Kansas sophomore forward **Perry Ellis** goes over senior guard **Will Spardling** for a layup in the first half of K-State's 85-82 overtime upset victory over the No. 7-ranked Jayhawks in the 279th Sunflower Showdown on Feb. 10, 2014, in Bramlage Coliseum.

Kansas hasn't decided which Kansas it wants to be: the team who lost to Temple by 25 points or the one who just won back-to-back wins, both by double-digits.

Texas' lofty aspirations have gone south (pun intended), at least temporarily. Oklahoma has looked like a team that can't pull it together down the stretch and West Virginia just got pounded at home by a Texas team that, as previously stated, has by and far underachieved.

The rest of the not-TCU and Texas Tech-Big 12 has work to do to prove that they're a real contender still. A contender to make any real noise in the NCAA tournament.

This has been the Big 12's issue for a long time. For one reason or another, it is very hard for this conference to put together a great team to make a great run in the tournament.

But that's how you can respect; you consistently prove that you are the best by having teams

show up in the Final Four more than twice in a decade.

Only the Pac-12, who no one is accusing of doing anything near playing great basketball, has less championship game appearances in the past decade.

Thanks to the Butler, the Big 12 is tied with the Horizon League with a beautiful two title appearances since the 2004-05 season.

It is only around the halfway point of the season. There is a lot of time for teams to grow, and time for teams to shrink. Maybe someone in the Big 12 will emerge as not only the top team in the conference, but a serious Final Four-type squad.

As of now, according the media, the Big 12 is the best.

But, when tourney time rolls around, will they be the best when it actually counts?

Timothy Everson is a sophomore in mass communications. Please send comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com.

Big 12 Power Rankings



EMILIO RIVERA
THE COLLEGIAN

share of their 11th-straight Big 12 title. Chances are they'll still be in the race come late February. The Jayhawks simply have too much talent to slip far in the standings.

The Jayhawks rebound and shoot better than most teams in the conference. However, problems with turnovers could cause them issues down the road.

they could easily be losses. Take Texas Southern, for example.



9. TCU (14-4, 1-4)

Undeclared described the Horned Frogs up until the Big 12 season started. Since then, TCU has seemingly been battered and beaten throughout the first part of their conference slate.

To make matters worse, TCU's schedule doesn't get any easier, having nine of its remaining 13 games against ranked opponents. Such is the life of a Big 12 team.

7. No. 21 Baylor (14-4, 2-3)

For some, it's hard to fathom why a ranked team is so far down its own conference's power ranking. But a temporary ranking cannot make up for a poor start to the conference. Also, playing a NIAA team like Huston-Tillotson midway through the Big 12 season doesn't help gain respect.

5. No. 18 West Virginia (15-3, 3-2)

Talk about flying under the radar; the Mountaineers have cemented themselves in the top 25; however, they are just 1-2 against ranked Big 12 teams through five conference games. That mark will have to improve if West Virginia wishes to be in the title hunt.



8. Oklahoma State (13-5, 3-3)

After starting their conference schedule 2-1, the Cowboys lost their last two games by a combined 27 points to Kansas and Oklahoma.

Oklahoma State has two of the best scorers in the conference in senior guard Le'Bryan Nash and junior guard Phil Forte III, who are the second (17.7 ppg) and third best (17.4 ppg) scorers in the conference, respectively. But consistency will be needed in Stillwater if the Cowboys hope to contend.

10. Texas Tech (10-9, 0-6)

Under head coach Tubby Smith, the Red Raiders are a combined 6-17 the past two conference seasons. In Big 12 play this season, the Red Raiders have a scoring margin of -15.8 points per game, a mark that shows just how south Texas Tech's season has gone since the New Year.

Emilio Rivera is sophomore in mass communications. Please send comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com.

What to know ahead of Saturday's Big 12 matchup between K-State, Oklahoma State



TATE STEINLAGE
THE COLLEGIAN

The K-State men's basketball team left Stillwater, Oklahoma three weeks ago in despair. They faced a three-game losing streak, their star guard was benched and people were already calling the season a failure.

How quickly things can change in the Big 12.

The Wildcats persevered when they needed to, and played then the upset role all the way up the conference standings. There are no moral victories in sports, but their performance against Iowa State Tuesday was enough to quiet the doubters.

Now, K-State returns to face the Cowboys as a much different team. Oklahoma State, too, isn't the same. With the Big 12 as unpredictable as it's ever been, fans are in for another treat Saturday.

Here's who has the advantage and how the two teams matchup:

Front court: K-State

Senior forward Thomas Gipson was up and down during the nonconference season. He was in foul trouble, often out of position and not the wrecking-ball force we've seen in recent years.

That all changed once conference play started. "Big Gip" is averaging 10.5 points per game against Big 12 foes. He's been dominant underneath, scoring against much taller opposition and helping draw fouls. When Foster has been benched, Gipson has been the go-to force. He's fueling an offense that still isn't deadly, but is chugging along.

Then there's Nino Williams, who has been arguably the best player for the team all season. In K-State's last two games, Williams dropped 18 and 22 points. His production has been huge, but so has junior forward Stephen Hurt's. Hurt still isn't providing the big numbers offensively, but he's had spurts here and there where he's been a dominant big man.

Against Oklahoma State, K-State should have the advantage underneath. Hybrid big man Michael Cobbins stands at just 6 feet and 8 inches for Oklahoma State. Gipson has been going up against much taller guys all year, so expect a big performance for the K-State senior.

The Cowboys do have two

7-footers on the bench in Marek Soucek and Anthony Allen Jr., but neither are averaging above 2 points per game.

Back court: Oklahoma State

Even after losing Marcus Smart to the NBA, Travis Ford's Cowboys have picked up right where they left off in the back court.

Phil Forte III is following up on a stellar sophomore year, averaging more than 17 points and two rebounds a game through 18 games this season. Anthony Hickey Jr. is closing in on a double-digit scoring average too, and junior guard Jeff Newberry has contributed well, including 10 points against K-State earlier this season.

Oklahoma State is a well-oiled machine when it comes to guard play. K-State, on the other hand, is still piecing together a jigsaw puzzle. It's coming together, but it's not quite there.

Sophomores Wesley Ivundu and Jevon Thomas have emerged as consistent contributors on both sides of the ball. Ivundu's height frustrates scorers, while Thomas' ability to penetrate and kick has added a new dimension to the K-State offense.

Still, Oklahoma State has the experience. The Cowboys have it pieced together now, while K-State remains a work in progress. Advantage goes to

the visitors.

K-State X-Factor: Wesley Ivundu

Opposing Big 12 coaches have raved about Ivundu. He's lanky, athletic and present in every phase of the game.

Ivundu seems poised to take that next step in his game where coaches speak more to his playmaking ability rather than just his hustle or athletic ability.

Against the Cowboys in Stillwater, Ivundu had 0 points in 33 minutes. Zero. Since then, the sophomore has averaged 7 points a game. He's been more aggressive at the basket and isn't passing up open looks from behind the arc.

He'll need another solid outing to lift K-State back into the win column.

Oklahoma State X-Factor: Michael Cobbins

Cobbins isn't a scorer. That's not his game. Even as a senior, he's averaging just 6.7 points per game. However, in Oklahoma State's five losses this season, Cobbins is averaging just 4 points per game.

Like Gipson for K-State, Cobbins is undersized as a hybrid center. He's typically matched up against players with at least 3 inches on him. But when he plays well, Oklahoma State plays well.



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

Senior forward **Thomas Gipson** attempts to use his large stature to force his way past Texas Tech center **Isaiah Manderson** in the second half of the Wildcats' 58-51 win over the Red Raiders on January 14, 2015, in Bramlage Coliseum.

Cobbins will have his hands full with the big frames of Gipson and Hurt. If he's unable to get going early, expect Oklahoma State to be at a major disadvantage down low.

Best matchup: Nino Williams vs. Le'Bryan Nash

Arguably the two best players on the court. Similar yet different play styles. Both on hot streaks. This is a matchup to keep your eyes on.

Tate Steinlage is a junior in mass communications. Please send comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com.

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